



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve

P.O. Box 140

Gustavus, Alaska 99826-0140

Tel: 907-697-2230 · Fax: 907-697-2654



IN REPLY REFER TO:

August 13, 2008

Dear Tatshenshini/Alsek River Runners:

The National Park Service is writing to inform you that the Tweedsmuir Glacier above Turnback Canyon has surged and could block off the Alsek River at any time. Such an event could result in outburst floods that could threaten the safety of river rafters on the main Alsek, or of Tatshenshini rafters below the confluence with the Alsek. Such an event could likewise threaten people and facilities in Dry Bay.

Because this is such a dynamic situation it is difficult to predict when or even if this event might occur. We are currently monitoring river gauges above the Tweedsmuir Glacier at Bates River and below at Walker Glacier through the National Weather Service's Weather Forecast Office in Juneau. A marked decrease in flow at the downstream gauge as compared to the upstream gauge could indicate a damming event, although these gauges can only approximate what is actually happening on the river. We are also looking to place a camera near the Tweedsmuir face to provide real-time monitoring, but that is still in process at this time. In the meantime the National Park Service along with other federal and state agencies and officials in British Columbia, the Yukon and Parks Canada are preparing contingency plans should a damming event occur.

We realize that for many of you the wilderness experience is an important component of your trip. The great unpredictability of this glacier adds significantly to your wilderness adventure. However, it is essential that you be vigilant in your observations and use good judgment at all times. Since a communication link could be important to your safety, we strongly recommend that all rafting parties carry a satellite phone or radio with them.

For those of you running the Alsek, when you reach the portage at Turnback Canyon you will know what the situation is, so proceed with your trip accordingly. For those on the Tatshenshini, as your rafting party nears the confluence of the Alsek we recommend that you stop and find a location from which to observe the Alsek River. Does the water seem abnormally high, or low, based on what you have experienced up to that point? Is there large debris or ice in the current or on the riverbank? Is there fog on the river? If you have a way to communicate, please call our **Tweedsmuir Hotline at 907-697-2695 or the National Weather Service at 907-790-6824**. If the NPS or NWS have evidence of a damming event you will be advised of the situation as it is understood it at the time, and you may be given instructions about what to do. If you do not have a way to communicate but perceive the flow of the Alsek River to be unusually high, low or unusual, we recommend that you go no further. Find a place on high ground where you will be safe and visible. Look for other rafting parties in the vicinity and make contact with them, or wait for the next party to come down river. If no groups have a satellite



phone, pool your experience and judgment and come up with a plan. If you determine that it is unsafe to continue, please stay where you are. If the federal agencies have determined that the situation warrants contact, an aircraft will be dispatched, weather permitting, to contact all permitted parties on the river. Keep in mind that this system is imperfect, and you must rely on your own judgment at all times. And remember, safety always comes first.

If you are on the river below the Alsek-Tatshenshini confluence and you notice a significant change in the river's flow, climb to higher ground and assess the situation. Attempt to contact the above listed Hotlines for information, and if you can make contact either agency, alert them of the situation and of your location. Follow the recommendations above.

Sigurd Ohlson understood the inherent risk in wilderness travel when he wrote, "The mystery and unknown are the true lures of the wilderness. We go for something that extends us, something we have to earn." As you go out into this wilderness landscape, go with all your senses enhanced, and be safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cherry Payne", with a stylized, flowing script.

Cherry Payne
Superintendent